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Population and Food Pressure in the Orient

A radio discussion over WGN and the Mutual Broadcasting System

E. B. ESPENSHADE, JR.

Associate Professor of Geography, Northwestern University

D. GALE JOHNSON

Associate Professor of Economics, University of Chicago

GEORGE F. KENNAN

Counselor, United States Department of State

L. DUDLEY STAMP

Professor of Social Geography, London School of Economics

Moderator: LEIGHTON BORIN

Director, The Reviewing Stand, Northwestern University

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Population and Food Pressure in the Orient

MR. BORIN: Our first speaker, by transcription, is George F. Kennan, counselor to the State Department and top-ranking authority on the Soviet Union. The remarks that Mr. Kennan now makes are taken from a speech delivered at the first Centennial Conference on International Understanding held at Northwestern University on January 29th of this year. Mr. Kennan:

MR. KENNAN: Let's take first this question of population. In 1750, just before the formation of our Republic, the population of the world was estimated at 660,000,000. A hundred years ago, by 1851, it had risen to something more nearly 1,000,000,000. Today, in 1951, it is estimated at over 2,200,000,000!

'Workshop Areas'

Today large portions of the earth have reached so severe a state of overpopulation in terms of their own resources that they can survive only by making workshops out of their territories, and exchanging their products for the food and raw materials they need. Strangely enough, these overpopulated "workshop" areas, despite their tremendous economic vulnerability, and despite all the shocks that occurred to them during the recent war—and most of them got very severe ones—have been able to keep going, and have been able to maintain a vigorous civilization (with our help, to be sure) in these recent years.

But there are other areas which seem to be in an even worse way, and these are the ones which are both backward industrially and overpopulated. They are ridden to a large extent by traditional prejudices and behavior patterns which weigh very heavily upon their ability even to approach the solution of that problem by increasing productivity, and actually, as things stand today, there is

no evidence that increased productivity alone would have more than a temporary palliative effect on their problem, because in those countries the population is constantly pressing against a ceiling created by the supply of food and other things necessary for existence, and fertility is such that the population will readily rush in to fill any new area or vacuum that is created by the raising of that ceiling.

The only answer here that I can see—the only material answer—would seem to lie in some form of limitation of births, and most of those areas are so far from that that we can dismiss the possibility entirely from this discussion.

'Restless Peoples'

No one can speak with any certainty about these matters; there are tremendous exceptions to anything you want to say about them. There are exceptions to that which I say here. There are no problems more baffling and elusive than these questions of the relationship of population to food supply and to other fundamental conditions. But it is my impression that there are large and significant portions of the earth today where the combination of all these things has created a highly unsatisfactory and even tragic state of affairs, characterized by immense restlessness and bewilderment among the respective peoples. And I think we have to adjust ourselves to the prospect that a large segment of the world population, in terms of numbers, is destined to continue to live in a state of bitter competition for possession of inadequate resources; that this is going to continue to produce reactions on their part that will not be happy ones, and which will inevitably place limitations on the degree of intimacy that we can hope to achieve, rapidly and hastily, between ourselves and themselves.

This is the essence of one of our great problems of foreign affairs, namely, our relations with the peoples whose lives are marked as much by technical backwardness and material poverty as our lives are marked by technical advance and material abundance. We should not underrate the depth of this problem. There is nothing more difficult than for a rich man to talk to a poor man and have the poor man listen to him respectfully, and when we talk to these people, that relationship comes into it, and I think we've got to be very, very careful to try to talk to them in terms of their problems, not of our dreams and preconceptions here, and not to promise them too much or to lead them to believe that we have answers which we do not have.

MR. BORIN: Thank you, Mr. Kennan.

Continuing this Northwestern University Reviewing Stand discussion are E. B. Espanshade, Jr., Associate Professor of Geography at Northwestern University; D. Gale Johnson, Associate Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago; and L. Dudley Stamp, Professor of Social Geography at the London School of Economics.

Gentlemen, you will remember that Mr. Kennan said, "A large segment of the world population, in terms of numbers, is destined to continue to live in a state of bitter competition for possession of inadequate resources." When he makes this statement, Stamp, what areas of the world does he have in mind?

Underdeveloped Areas

MR. STAMP: I imagine, of course, that he is thinking of those many areas which we call underdeveloped, especially in the tropics, but I take it that this morning we are really going to consider a part of the area concerned—that is to say, the Orient.

Now, as I see it, we have India and Pakistan on the one hand, with over four hundred million people. We have China on the other hand, also with over four hundred million people, and there is a block of countries in be-

tween—let's call them Southeast Asia and the continuation into the islands of Indonesia. They are all different.

'Resources Vary Greatly'

MR. JOHNSON: It is quite true that they are all quite different, particularly, the Southeast Asia countries, because they are large-scale, important producers of agricultural raw materials, such as rubber, which they export. Before this last war Burma and one or two other countries were also important exporters of rice. They essentially have far more resources in terms of their population than either India or China.

MR. ESPANSHADE: In addition, locally, within the Southeast Asia area, there are some areas of intense population pressure such as in Java and in parts of French Indochina, although, as Stamp says, there are many areas in this region which could be developed and could support a much larger population.

MR. STAMP: Let's look at it in this way. Let's take India and Pakistan. There they have less than two acres per head of population, of land of all sorts, and the actual productive land on which those people live is considerably less than one acre.

Now, let's take the relatively prosperous possessor of resources, like Burma. They have 14 or 15 acres to play with. So there is a contrast. It's the great, overpopulated—if you like, densely populated—countries of India and Pakistan that I think we ought to look at.

MR. JOHNSON: One might contrast the figures for India with our own, where we have considerably in excess of two acres of very fertile land, in large part, per person—much more than twice as much land per person as in India. This shows up definitely in the amount of food we have available. In this country we eat over 3300 calories a day, whereas the Indians do well if they get 2000 calories a day.

MR. BORIN: Why do these conditions of population and food supply, in Kennan's words, make for "immense restlessness and bewilderment"?

MR. STAMP: Well, I should say that what you really have there is people living near the starvation level, and if they get a bad harvest, if the rains fail, as they frequently do in India, they are going to have millions reduced to death.

MR. BORIN: That actually happened this year, didn't it?

MR. STAMP: It did. And it's constantly happening in different years. Now, when you have people who are living under conditions of that sort, and someone comes along and says, "Why not try something new? Why not try Communism? You can't be worse off"—there is an immense temptation to try something. It's like the drowning man clutching at the straw. And there is where I see the danger.

MR. ESPANSHADE: I grant you that these people have a sense of futility and injustice around them. It seems to me there are two ways of looking at this problem of poverty. In the first place, you can explain the poverty on an ideological basis. You can say that the poverty is due to the fact that the landlords grind down the farmers with their high taxes. Or you can look at it from the point of view that the poverty in these areas is due to technological reasons, that you have a large population dependent almost entirely on agriculture, and that agriculture is essentially a "hoe" agriculture.

'Cycle of Poverty'

MR. STAMP: I'd like to refer to what I think we might call the "cycle of poverty." You take the ordinary Indian peasant cultivator. He hasn't the money to buy good seed; he hasn't the money to buy fertilizer; he hasn't the money to buy implements. He plants his poor seed, and he gets a poor yield. He eats all the food he can produce. He has no surplus for sale. Therefore, at the end of the year, he has no money; he's probably still more in debt to his landlord than previously; he probably has a daughter he has to marry off and provide with a dowry. And there he is, with

this cycle of poverty. Now, how are you going to break into that?

MR. BORIN: Have the Communists broken into it in China in any way?

MR. ESPANSHADE: Well, the Communists in China, of course, have attempted to solve the problem, but I think it's too early for us to tell what they're going to be able to do.

They have divided the agricultural lands of northern China, but to divide those lands is not going to increase the agricultural productivity. They have a certain advantage, however. They have a strong, immediate appeal to the Chinese peasants, and that immediate appeal gives them certain cohorts who follow very blindly because they gain immediately. But they are not going to answer the problem unless they can increase the productivity in these areas.

MR. JOHNSON: Yes, the problem of increasing productivity is very seldom, if ever, solved by making farms smaller and smaller, because each farmer generally will have less capital, and consequently cannot buy the fertilizer, cannot even use the very simplest improved techniques. I think we should not forget here that the problem of overpopulation or poor food supply is also a consequence of an essential imbalance between the number of people and the quantity of land. It is not only low productivity from the land, but the fact that the land itself is limited in supply, relative to the number of people.

MR. STAMP: Well, I want to make certain distinctions there.

As far as India is concerned, the acre yield of crops is very low indeed, and I think that there could be an enormous increase in output in food in India from existing land if only we could break into that cycle—say, by starting off with fertilizer.

Intense Cultivation

Now, as far as I know, with China it's a different story. There they have this intense cultivation—call them all gardeners rather than farmers—and

they really do use their land very intensively.

MR. JOHNSON: Yes. The Indian situation may be very comparable to the one the Japanese faced over the past forty or fifty years, in which they have increased their yields by at least 40 per cent by just doing the sort of things you mentioned, with more fertilizer, somewhat better seeds—in fact, considerably better seeds—and by better techniques. This is very important.

MR. ESPANSHADE: I grant you, Stamp, that yields in India are considerably lower than they are in China, but even in the case of China there is room for considerable improvement in agricultural productivity. If you compare Chinese yields with those of the intensive agriculture of Europe, you could have 20 or 30 per cent improvement in yields in China.

MR. STAMP: May I break in there, because I'm really not quite sure about that. It's certainly true of India, but we must not judge these Oriental countries from our standards. You know, we're thinking in terms of mechanized farming, and so on.

What one has to get there is not any saving in labor. One has to get this increase in yield from the small units, and I'm not even sure that I agree that there is anything wrong in getting smaller units. Intensive cultivation by hand—that's the point.

Mechanization

MR. JOHNSON: Yes, but you had very intensive cultivation by hand, even in China, prior to the reduction in the size of units in most places. But I would quite agree with you that mechanization, in our modern sense of Western Europe and the United States, is not the answer, because it may well drive down yields as contrasted to what they could be by hand cultivation with good techniques and good seeds.

MR. BORIN: You gentlemen believe, then, that it isn't simply a problem of overpopulation.

MR. ESPANSHADE: Well, as Stamp has already said, there is this problem of underproduction, although I feel that basically, the problem is still one of overpopulation.

You take the farms of China. You'll find that the per capita production is about twice as great on a farm of ten acres as it is on a farm of about three acres, and you want some excess of production here in order to increase the standard of living of these people.

To divide the farms merely means that you have less per capita production, so that underproduction isn't the only problem. I still think that there is a strong case here for overpopulation in these regions, Stamp.

MR. STAMP: Well, I'm not sure that I agree on the definition of overpopulation. You see, I come from Britain where we have less than half the area of land per head than there is in India. Our problem, if you are right, is even far worse.

MR. JOHNSON: Yes, but over the years you have been able to import half of your food supply.

MR. STAMP: That's true.

MR. JOHNSON: You do it by exchanging your manufactured goods for it.

'Traditional Prejudices'

MR. BORIN: A few minutes ago Mr. Kennan pointed out that the Orient is ridden by traditional prejudices and behavior patterns that tend to block any attempts to solve the problems caused by overpopulation and inadequate food supplies. Johnson, what are some of the more important prejudices and behavior patterns that he had in mind?

MR. JOHNSON: Well, it's a little hard to define either prejudices or behavior patterns in a way that is very meaningful. I suppose he perhaps means such things as following the same techniques of production as they have over the years, of having certain family attitudes with respect to the controlling of the number of people, and considerations of that sort.

MR. ESPANSHADE: Well, in both China

and India I think you find the family is the cornerstone of the social structure. They don't have social security in China. A Chinese farmer has a large family to provide for his old age. It's a matter of survival, so he obtains his economic security to some extent from having a large family.

In addition, in China, ancestor worship is an important part of their attitude, and as an outgrowth of that, throughout China's agricultural regions, you will find three or four per cent of the land may be devoted to graves—excellent land which could be used for increasing agricultural production.

'Rapid Changes'

MR. STAMP: Yes, I agree that is perfectly true, but I don't want to have this question of prejudice overemphasized. You know, the peasant farmer in any land is conservative, and he likes to be absolutely convinced before he changes his ways, and he is very right about that. But the point I'd like to make is that at the present time, especially as I know India, the changes are enormous, and the changes are very rapid.

You see, you have the caste system more or less swept away on one side, and since India and Pakistan became self-governing countries in 1947, in the British Commonwealth, you have all these little principalities that have been joined together. In fact, the Indians themselves have done much in that way which I don't think the British Indian government could have done from outside.

MR. JOHNSON: Yes, I think that is true, though I suppose we might come back, just a second, to Mr. Kennan's point. Perhaps one of the things he is speaking about in terms of prejudices is the case of the sacred bulls and cows in India.

MR. BORIN: Do you want to tell us about that, Stamp?

MR. STAMP: Yes. I think the people know that the sacred bull is allowed to wander about as much as he likes. I think you still get him in the streets

of Calcutta, sitting under the arcades of the Grand Hotel, and you're liable to fall over him if you're late back at night.

Well, it seems strange to us, but then, you see, the cow and the bull, after all, are the basis of so much life in the country, it's no wonder that they are revered.

MR. BORIN: A moment ago you said some of the behavior patterns and prejudices were being broken down quite rapidly in these countries. Is that true?

'Change at Upper Level'

MR. STAMP: That's true. I think it's very marked with what we call the upper level of the people in India—the students in the universities and colleges, men and women working together in a way in which they didn't five or ten years ago.

MR. BORIN: I'd like to put you on a spot here, Stamp, on this question of breaking down prejudices and behavior patterns. You say that has happened since the colonialism of the Dutch and the British has been wiped out in the Orient. Did the colonialism of Western Europe tend to perpetuate these behavior patterns and prejudices?

MR. JOHNSON: I'd like to come to Mr. Stamp's defense of these Western powers.

I suspect there is a great deal to be said for this: One reason the changes in India have been so rapid in the last four or five years is that the Indians no longer have the British as the "whipping boy," as the cause of all their problems, and since things didn't materially improve the instant the British left, they had to look to themselves, to problems indigenous to themselves, and now that they are looking at these problems rationally, they are doing something about them.

MR. BORIN: How did these religious customs operate to cripple food production? I think you started to develop that, Stamp.

MR. STAMP: Yes, I think there are some, but I don't know that one could pick out any particular ones, and as

I say, I think the change is taking place. For example, with regard to cattle: We think of cattle as producing milk, and you have, for example, the dairy industry being developed in India at the present time. Changes are taking place.

One of the great troubles, of course, is the use of the goat in India. It is allowed to go all over the place, causes soil erosion, and so on. Now, if the Indians can be persuaded that it is a useless animal, or not a very useful one, I think we may get improvement that way.

Solution?

MR. BORIN: Up to this point in our discussion, gentlemen, you have set forth the many problems in the Orient that exist because of the terrific population and food pressures in these areas. You have developed in some detail the many causes for these problems. With this background in mind, I should like to ask: What is being done now to solve the problems you described? Espanshade?

MR. ESPANSHADE: We're in the process of making a beginning, I would say, but the first thing that worries me here is how well equipped these nations are to solve some of these problems themselves. To an increasing degree I feel that education is the cornerstone upon which we must depend to solve these problems in the long run. In both China and India a large proportion of the population is illiterate. Until the people can communicate freely, you're not going to be able to bring about changes in agricultural techniques and so forth. They are short in technicians who can carry on or do the research work necessary to develop better agricultural procedures.

MR. STAMP: I think there is a point which we may be forgetting there, and that is the wonderful change that is caused by the use of the radio. You go to an Indian village today and you'll see the villagers sitting around their radio and listening, and getting advice about farming, and although they may not be able to read or write, they can

hear, and they can listen, and that is making a great change.

Colombo Plan

But may I refer at this stage to the Colombo Plan? I think it may be known that the prime ministers, the premiers of India, Pakistan, Ceylon and other British Commonwealth countries, notably Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United Kingdom, got together at Colombo and the peoples, themselves, put forth a six-year plan for their own development.

MR. ESPANSHADE: I think that last point you made, Stamp, is very important—that the Colombo Plan is the conception, largely, of the people who are involved.

MR. STAMP: Yes.

MR. ESPANSHADE: They, on their own initiative, to a large degree, have brought forth a plan to solve their own problems. And then, secondly, these countries in the Colombo Plan, underneath the conception, are supposed to supply at least half the capital involved.

MR. STAMP: That's right.

MR. ESPANSHADE: The British Government, I think, is going to put up about a billion dollars, is it not, Stamp?

MR. STAMP: Something of that sort.

MR. JOHNSON: I'm certainly glad we mentioned the Colombo Plan, because I suspect many Americans are not nearly as familiar with it as they are with our own Point Four program and, to a lesser extent, ECA. However, I am afraid that Point Four is still more of a wish and a hope than any real program, that we are really only starting on it, and that it has not yet made much of a contribution to these problems.

MR. ESPANSHADE: We haven't made much of a financial contribution under either of the two programs you mentioned, Johnson, but an interesting thing occurs to me there. In Europe we found it an expensive proposition to support the ECA program, and some people fear the Far East or the

Orient because it might be just as expensive. I think a program can be developed for the Orient which is far less expensive, because their needs are of a different sort. They need some technical help. They need aid in fertilizer; they need aid in medicines and in drugs, insecticides—things that don't cost as much as some of the capital equipment that Europe needed so vitally.

Point Four Program

MR. JOHNSON: I think two points should be made here, however: First of all, the Point Four program has to have a much longer duration than the plan for ECA. In other words, we can't go into it for two or three years, or even a decade. I think we have to assume that we have to carry it through for 20, 30 or 40 years, if not longer.

And, secondly, even though the capital requirements will not be large at first to do the sort of thing that has been discussed here, these countries will eventually want to industrialize. They will not want just to support themselves out of agriculture, which has never meant a very high level of living, and when industrialization starts, the capital costs will become large.

MR. STAMP: Well, now you've brought in industrialization, and don't let's get a wrong idea there.

During World War II, of course, tremendous strides were made with factory industries in India. That's been going on for some time, but the net result is that you have fewer people employed in manufacturing goods than you had before, because the old village industries, you see, have so largely gone.

But may I throw in a point here? I think perhaps we're still judging these countries too much from our angle of material civilization. Now, take the Burmans. What they want is not material progress so much in our sense as the leisure to enjoy life and to sit back and see the beauties of nature. That is really their objective in life. Don't forget it.

MR. BORIN: In other words, we have to develop programs in their terms rather than our terms. Isn't that what you're saying?

MR. STAMP: Absolutely. Yes.

MR. ESPANSHADE: I agree with that, Borin, decidedly. I think the problem could be stated like this: It's simple to tell a man that somebody is being unfair to him, or unjust to him; it's a different thing to tell him that he's doing these things wrongly, or his production isn't carried out by the right procedure.

'Decrease Population'

MR. BORIN: We've been talking here about what is being done. What should be done in these areas, specifically? Johnson?

MR. JOHNSON: I would agree that we should extend further education, we should extend further technical assistance to aid these farmers to increase their productivity, and we should also do something which will help them bring populations within reasonable limits. In other words, we cannot, I think, stand a population explosion in the Orient.

MR. BORIN: Birth control?

MR. JOHNSON: Birth control is one aspect, but it's probably not the entire answer. It's not as simple as that.

MR. ESPANSHADE: In my opinion, we've got to enter into a phase of sociological engineering along the lines of birth control. Physically, it isn't possible to carry on birth control in these areas now. You lack cheap, simple means, and you don't have the sanitary facilities for such things. But, in the long run, I think we have to come to some such answer.

MR. STAMP: There is no doubt but that we are dealing with one of the great world problems of the present day, and I do feel that these countries have to work out their own salvation. They have to give us their viewpoints. Let's help them.

I'm not sure that I agree even with your approach to birth control. We've got to get it from their angle.



Suggested Readings

Compiled by Eugen Eisenlohr
and M. Helen Perkins, Reference Department,
Deering Library, Northwestern University.



JOHNSON, D. GALE. *Trade and Agriculture: A Study of Inconsistent Policies*. New York, John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1950.

Chapter ten provides a good discussion on "The Problem of Agricultural Poverty."

SCHULTZ, THEODORE W., ed. *Food for the World*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1946.

A consideration of the problem of world food supply by twenty-two specialists in economics, nutrition and agriculture.

STAMP, L. DUDLEY. *The World: A General Geography*. 12th ed. rev. New York, Longmans, Green and Co., 1950.

Pages 387-486 provide an excellent factual survey of the Orient, its population, vegetation, physical features, imports and exports, etc.

THOMPSON, WARREN S. *Population and Peace in the Pacific*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1946.

An analysis of the relation of population growth to changing economic conditions and the result on territorial controls. A detailed study of mineral resources, industrial development and the economic outlook of the different areas is included.

Commentary 9:122-8, F., '50. "Hunger Is Obsolete, If—: Unused Weapon to Win the Cold War." J. RORTY.

A report and analysis of the United Nations Scientific Conference on Conservation and Utilization of Resources.

Contemporary Review 176:351-4, D., '49. "World's Food Supply." A. F. FREMANTLE.

The population of China, India, Java and Japan has increased out of proportion to the development of their natural resources.

Far Eastern Survey 20:27-32, F. 7, '51. "The Colombo Plan." C. S. BLACTON.

The Commonwealth of Nations has instituted a program for cooperative economic development in south and southeast Asia.

Geographical Review 39:625-39, O., '49. "Toward an Appraisal of World Resources." G. F. WHITE.

An omnibus report of the proceedings of the "First Inter-American Conference on Conservation of Renewable Natural Resources" and other publications reflecting the current scientific thinking in the field of population and food supply.

Harper's Magazine 201:38-46, S., '50. "Population and Human Destiny." J. HUXLEY.

The combined threat of population pressure and militant Communism has forced the West to awaken from its lethargy and tackle the demographic problem of the present.

International Affairs 26:320-4, J1., '50. "Asia's Food Problems and Their Impact on the Western Countries." E. J. RUSSELL.

The Western world in order to secure peace must find a solution to the food problem of the East.

Pacific Affairs 33:65-76, Mr., '50. "The Role of Rural Industries in Undeveloped Areas." J. F. STEPANEK and C. H. PRIEN.

The basic requirement in underdeveloped areas is an improvement of the general living standards. This could be accomplished by the establishment of small rural industries and an improvement of agricultural methods.

Readers Digest 58:44-6, F., '51. "Danger: Population Explosion Ahead." G. I. BURCH.

The lowering of the high death rate through the spread of medicine to industrially backward countries has also caused a tremendous increase in population especially in the Orient.

Science News Letter 56:46, J1. 16, '49. "Asia Over-Populated." I. TAEUBER.

Over-population in Asia is the result of behavior developed over thousands of years when the individual groups would have been wiped out had it not been for high fertility rates. Their number of births now threaten survival as a nation due to the Western influence of order, medical and sanitary technology and improved methods of agriculture.

Scientific American 182:11-15, F., '50. "Population." W. S. THOMPSON.

A discussion of demographic problems and means by which they might be remedied.

Survey 86:477-81, N., '50. "Asia's Freedom and the Land Question." K. A. WITTFOGEL.

Land reform can bring about political stability and raise the standard of living.



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